IRON FURY EXERCISE TESTS NCO KNOWLEDGE

By Mr. Richard Le Blanc

Planning stability operations while fighting insurgents and handling a barrage of media inquiries may be routine to senior military officials, but for those completing the Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course (ANCOC) at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, the task can seem overwhelming. Still, the Maneuver Support Center (MANSCEN) Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Academy has incorporated this event into a weeklong simulation exercise called *Iron Fury*. More than 30 students from MANSCEN Chemical ANCOC 04-05 participated in this exercise 31 October–4 November 2005.

The exercise was supported by Battle Training and Simulation Division (BTSD) staff members and senior mentors from the Chemical Captains Career Course (CMC3) 04-05. The concept for senior mentor support—known as the *Senior Mentorship Program*—is the brainchild of the Chemical ANCOC first sergeant and has proven to be a great success in Iron Fury.

The senior mentors augment the small group leaders (SGLs) in guiding students during this very critical training. Comments from the SGLs have been very positive regarding the program. The senior SGL states that the tactical operations centers (TOCs) within the BTSD provide students with the forum to execute the military decision-making process (MDMP) at the brigade combat team level and teaches them the invaluable skill sets needed to advise commanders as chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) NCOs. Additionally, the training forum provides Chemical ANCOC and CMC3 students the opportunity to work together, building a foundation in the critical officer-NCO relationship. The comments from the senior mentors have been very positive, with comments such as: "Integration was a key—good insight of MDMP," "NCOs looked at the nuts and bolts of the operation," and "[I] saw the whole process [and] where to fit in and support the plan."

Iron Fury is actually a large practical exercise that is the culmination of a series of building block events from prior weeks of training. The exercise is designed to teach students the process of MDMP and how to apply these learned skills in a realistic, complex simulation. The students are brought together so that they can see the interaction between themselves and can recognize how capabilities are integrated into a combined arms operation. During the exercise, the students act as commanders and staff officers in a tactical scenario and make decisions based on what they learned during professional development. The exercise uses a combination of computer simulations, digital products, briefings, white cell information, and intelligence reports to develop a realistic common operating picture (COP). The students are given a division level operations order and placed in simulated brigade TOCs. The TOCs include a chemical battalion and a nuclear, biological, and chemical center (NBCC).

When the students are in their respective brigade TOCs, the simulation, interaction, and information flow begin. As the simulation proceeds, students in surrounding units get information and relay it over the radio to the division TOCs, just as they would do in an actual theater of operations. Information is also sent to the brigade TOCs through electronic media. All of the division and brigade TOCs in the simulated digital operations center are intertwined through an intranet that enables the students to relay real-time information sharing. The students formulate plans based on situational reports from their

Soldiers working in an operational cell

division and nearby units. Information exchanges occur simultaneously, flowing vertically within units; horizontally across units; and through e-mail, shared folders, and collaborative planning within operational cells. White cell information (additional battlefield characteristics) is added to introduce complexity in the students' working environments. To ensure that student training material remains relevant, BTSD leaders constantly relook and refine Iron Fury by incorporating lessons learned from current operations and updated critical task lists.

Engaging a canny, treacherous enemy causes students to develop refined warfighting strategies. As the students perform their military planning, they are forced to develop a plan against possible enemy actions. The enemy profiled in the exercise uses tactics and capabilities similar to those being used by current enemies of the United States. However, Iron Fury offers Soldiers the full-spectrum capability to conduct conventional operations in complex rural and urban terrains. It is a total training package that encompasses force-on-force scenarios, battles with insurgency forces, addresses a myriad of problems with the civilian population, and transitions to stability operations.

Traditionally, stability operations have been the most challenging part of any operation. It is only during the past decade that stability operations have been a primary focus in Army planning. Stability operations include providing internal protection for the civilian population, establishing nation-building operations, organizing a police force, and providing food and water—operations not performed in prior conflicts.

Simulation scenarios offer Soldiers the advantage of becoming familiar with updated and upgraded equipment—an option often not available in traditional field training. The ability to manipulate the enemy and create scenarios with diverse battlefield placement and timelines provides students with a more detailed picture of an asymmetrical operational area. The simulation allows the SGLs to challenge the students with a tactical field environment, where Soldiers and units maneuver on the battlefield. The exercise can be halted at any time to perform a discussion and after-action review on issues just addressed and then continued to completion. This would be very hard to do in a field exercise.

Soldiers hurriedly prepare for a combined arms rehearsal.

Conducting training in a controlled environment, where outside factors do not come into play, is a safe and cost-effective method. Can you imagine the cost to send a division to the National Training Center (NTC) or a brigade to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC)? Simulation is a building block to higher-level exercises and saves the US Army money on equipment and resources.

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